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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001473

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [EAID](#) [BA](#) [LE](#) [REGION](#) [POL](#)
SUBJECT: TFLE01: BAHRAINIS RALLY, RAISE MONEY IN SUPPORT OF LEBANON

REF: A. MANAMA 1458

[¶](#)B. MANAMA 1414

[¶](#)C. MANAMA 1391

[¶](#)D. MANAMA 1339 (NOTAL)

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[¶](#)11. (C) The conflict in Lebanon continues to move Bahraini citizens and political, religious, and civil society organizations into action in support of the people of Lebanon and Hizballah. With the notable exception of some hard-line Salafis, most segments of Bahraini society are united in their support for Hizballah's "resistance" to Israel. The August 7 Arab League Foreign Ministers meeting in Beirut prompted King Hamad to issue a statement reaffirming that Bahrain would stand by Lebanon, and the Bahraini representative at the meeting backed Saudi Arabia's call for an emergency Arab League summit. A multi-day festival in support of the "resistance" was well-attended and orderly, but failed to attract the top tier of Bahraini Shia leaders. Two large events took place on August 7, a march of several thousand mostly Shia citizens and a telethon run by the Chamber of Commerce that raised over \$1 million for the Lebanese people. The streets continue to be mostly quiet despite rhetoric highly critical of the United States at the rallies and emotional tirades by columnists. End Summary.

Statements in Support of Lebanon

[¶](#)12. (C) As clashes continue in Lebanon, Bahrainis remain active in support of the people of Lebanon. With the exception of hard-line Salafis, most sectors of Bahraini society also voice support for Hizballah's "resistance" to Israel. Senior GOB leaders have spoken publicly in support of Lebanon and several large-scale events and many smaller rallies focusing on Lebanon have taken place over the past few days, all orderly and peaceful.

[¶](#)13. (U) On the occasion of the Arab League (AL) Foreign Ministers meeting in Beirut August 7, King Hamad issued a statement saying that Bahrain will stand by Lebanon until it gets past this difficult stage "caused by Israel's brutal aggression." Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar, who attended the AL meeting in Beirut, announced that Bahrain supports the idea of holding an emergency Arab League summit, as called for by Saudi King Abdullah. The press also published a statement from Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak saying that, in his August 7 meeting with the Charge, he "demanded the U.S.

exert efforts to stop Israel's aggression on Lebanon" (Ref A).

Festivals and Rallies Orderly

¶4. (C) The long-anticipated "festival" in support of Lebanon entitled "I'm At Your Service, Oh Resistance" took place at the Bahrain International Convention Center August 2-4. It featured speeches and poems by activists and youth pledging support for Lebanon and Hizballah, and several speakers called for a boycott of American and Israeli products. Although the organizer was Mohammed Al Ghuraifi, a Shia cleric and member of leading Shia political society Al Wifaq, none of the most prominent members of the Shia community - political or religious - were present. The festival was well-attended but never spilled out into neighboring streets or empty lots, as some had feared.

¶5. (SBU) Bahrainis participated in two large-scale events on August 7 - a march adjacent to a major highway organized by two Shia organizations, and a high-tech telethon in a luxury hotel hosted by the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI). The march, organized by Al Wifaq and the (Shia) Islamic Enlightenment Society, drew thousands of men, women and children (estimates range from 2-10,000 people). There were many Hizballah or plain yellow flags and a few Bahraini and Lebanese flags. Some participants carried mock rifles and banners that denounced Israel, the United States, and "the silence of Arab regimes." The primary speaker, Mohammed Sanqoor of the (Shia) Islamic Clerics Council, pledged support for Hizballah and criticized the U.S./French draft UN Security Council resolution. Again, the top tier of Shia leaders, religious and political, were not present.

Business People Raise Over \$1 Million

¶6. (U) The BCCI telethon raised \$1.1 million, with the largest single donation of \$150,000 coming from the Gulf Finance House. The five-hour event was broadcast on Bahrain Television and featured testimonials by many Bahrainis, from the well-known to the anonymous, as well as by the Lebanese Ambassador to Bahrain. Lead organizer BCCI Board Member Jawad Al Hawaj said that the event was held under the auspices of the National Committee in Aid of the Lebanese People and the proceeds would be passed to the Bahrain Red Crescent Society for delivery to the UN.

¶7. (U) The National Committee sent some 16 tons of goods, including food, medical supplies, mattresses, and electrical generators valued at \$900,000, to Lebanon, transported free of charge on a Gulf Air flight to Damascus. The UN took responsibility for delivering the goods to needy Lebanese. A second shipment of 15 tons of goods will leave Bahrain within days.

¶8. (C) In a separate effort, a participant in a delegation composed of representatives of six political societies told the press that the group will depart August 8 for Syria and, conditions permitting, Lebanon. They will deliver financial assistance and medicines to Lebanese and Palestinian organizations. They also seek to establish closer relations with NGOs in the area. Perhaps recognizing the possible legal complications related to delivering assistance without obtaining permission from the government, a spokesman for Al Wifaq, one of the six societies participating in this effort, said August 8 that the delegation will not deliver any financial or material aid. "The main purpose of the visit is to offer our political support and solidarity with the Lebanese people," he said.

Mostly Quiet Streets, But Rhetoric Continues

¶9. (C) Despite the uptick in marches, the situation on the

street continues to be fairly quiet. There have been no reports of clashes or violence with the exception of some small-scale altercations between protesters and police in the aftermath of a July 21 march in the vicinity of the U.S. Embassy (Ref D). FD FSN noticed a sign hung on a school wall in a Shia village reading, "The American Ambassador is an undesirable person. He should leave the country." A Salafi group distributed a statement following a march held in a largely Sunni area on August 4 that urged citizens not to support Lebanon because "the war is not Lebanese, Arab, or Muslim. It is between the Jews of Khaybar (a reference to a battle between a Jewish tribe and Mohammed and his followers) and the Majoos (unbelievers also from the time of Mohammed)." The statement uses a play on words to accuse Hizballah's (Shia) followers of being idol worshippers.

¶10. (SBU) In their Friday prayer sermons on August 4, both Sunni and Shia clerics stuck with their theme of supporting Lebanon and the resistance and rejecting attempts to divide people along sectarian lines. Sunni Shaikh Salah Al Jowder criticized fatwas issued against Hizballah, saying they aim to incite sectarianism. He urged people to remain united "in the face of the Zionist enemy." Another Sunni cleric said, "this war has revealed that Israel is a paper tiger and that the myth of the unbeatable and undefeatable Israeli Army was created by the Arab media." Columnists praise Hizballah Secretary General Nasrallah and blame the United States for

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allowing Israel to wage its war on Lebanon while criticizing Arab leaders for their "silence." Abdullah Al Abbasi, with the Arabic daily Al Watan, wrote August 9, "The embassies of these two countries (U.S. and UK) must realize that anger in the Arab street has reached a stage where they will have to pay a very high price for their support for Israel, especially in major Arab countries that will eventually have their regimes changed. Only then will America and Britain realize their historic mistake, which harmed their interests in the region."

Comment

¶11. (C) Now almost one month into the Lebanon conflict, Bahrainis are channeling their anger and concern into mostly benign or positive activities - marches, rallies, speeches, and fundraising. Even the Qana bombing did not result in clashes or strife. In a country where the demographics make

it ripe for sectarian friction, there has been by and large remarkable support of (the Shia) Hizballah and Nasrallah for their "stand" against Israel. Unfortunately, what now seems lost in the outpouring of support for Lebanon is the fact that Hizballah started the fight with its attack on the Israeli patrol and kidnapping of two IDF soldiers, that there are innocent civilians killed, injured, and uprooted on both sides of the conflict, and that Hizballah's actions have precipitated an untenable situation over which to date the Lebanese government and people have had little say.

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